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HISTORY
OF
WEST BOYLSTON

By

Rev. C.C.P. Crosby

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HISTORY OF WORCESTER COUNTY.

HISTORY OF WEST BOYLSTON.

BY REV. C. C. P. CROSBY.

IN presenting to the public a history of this town, we shall have no occasion to record any of those sanguinary scenes, which distinguish the annals of many of our neighboring towns, arising from the incursions of a savage foe.

No predatory warfare has ever stained the soil, or crimsoned the streams, with the blood of white men. Scarcely an incident, aside from the general course of human affairs, has transpired within any recollection, or is entered upon any record. So that the chief interest in the history of this town, comes from what it now is, rather than from what it has been.

Within a few years, the town has obtained an importance on account of the facilities for manufacturing purposes, little expected by its early inhabitants. And it is but a limited stretch of prophetic genius to predict, that within a few years, this town will be the theatre of extensive manufacturing and mechanical operations.

This town was settled as early as 1720, by several families from Marlborough; being then included in the grant of land called Shrewsbury. Among the first settlers were Benjamin Hinds, Isaac Temple, Edward Goodale, William Whitney, — Bixby, and — Holt. These inhabitants suffered much from the want of dwellings, but were seldom, if ever molested by the Indians. They toiled for their posterity, as well as for themselves, and the descendants of these families are now numerous, and respectable in town; several of them residing on their paternal possessions.

The history of this town, as a corporation, extends no farther back than 1808, being then merged in that of Boylston and Sterling, and earlier in that of Shrewsbury and Lancaster. The northern part of

this town is a portion of that tract called Shrewsbury leg; the southern part was identified with the north parish of that town, now Boylston, so called in honor of a distinguished family of the name, and incorporated in 1786. The leg was set off to the west parish in Lancaster, now Sterling, in 1768; this was done to accommodate the inhabitants with meetings, &c. as they were 10 or 12 miles distant from Shrewsbury. When this town was incorporated, a part of the first named tract, say about half, was included in the act. In 1796, the present town was erected into a precinct, and in 1808, enjoyed the benefit of an act of incorporation.

In obtaining these privileges, the inhabitants suffered much perplexity from their neighbors on every side, but by perseverance they obtained their wishes.

In 1792, sundry inhabitants of Boylston, Sterling, Holden, and Worcester, assembled to consider the expediency of forming a new town, or parish. They agreed to build a meeting house for their accommodation, next year. They then formed themselves into a society, and chose Mr. David Goodale clerk, and elected a parish committee.

The meeting house was raised in 1793, being 58 by 46 feet, with a cupola, in which a good bell was placed by Ward N. Boylston, Esq. and in eighteen months it was finished by the enterprise and public spirit of Ezra Beaman, Esq. "who proposed that for the proceeds of the pews already sold on the place, and for those remaining unsold, he would finish the house."

"This he did," says the record, "in a very decent and faithful manner, and at an expense far exceeding any compensation he can expect or hope to receive in future."

In 1794, the inhabitants applied to several clergymen in the vicinity, to meet and consult on the propriety of forming a church and hiring a preacher. Their result was against forming a church, but recommended "occasional worship in the house they had erected."

Why these gentlemen did not recommend constant worship, is difficult to imagine. The meeting house was dedicated January 1, 1795, by a Sermon from Rev. Daniel Grosvenor, of Paxton. In the same month, was sent to the General Court, a petition for an act of incorporation as a town; signed by 43 inhabitants of Boylston, 24 of Sterling, 21 of Holden, and 3 of Worcester.

This petition had a hearing in 1796, but being strenuously opposed by the representatives from each town where the petition-

ers resided, they only had leave to withdraw their petition. Soon after, they petitioned for an act to form themselves into a precinct, by the name of the second precinct in Boylston, Sterling, and Holden. This also was as strongly opposed as the other; but in June, 1796, an act was passed granting the prayer of the petitioners. Accordingly, the first meeting for the choice of precinct officers was held, August 22, 1796, under the warrant of John Sprague, Esq.

In 1796, a Congregational church was gathered, and received into fellowship by the Rev. Messrs. Sumner, Avery, and Hoicomb, consisting of thirty two members. March, 1797, the precinct voted to concur with the church in calling Mr. William Nash, A. M. to settle as a minister of the gospel; and at a subsequent meeting, they voted to give him £100, lawful money, as an annual salary, and in addition, they made a subscription for his benefit of about \$200. In June following, Mr. Nash returned an affirmative answer, in which he regrets the "want of an entire unanimity in the call," and on the 11th of October, he was ordained over the parish.

In 1801, the parish made a grant of \$800 to Mr. Nash, on certain conditions, to aid him in building a house.

In 1804, the manufacture of Cotton was here commenced, for the first time in the county of Worcester; but through inexperience, little progress was made for several years.

In 1808, the inhabitants succeeded in obtaining an act of incorporation for a town, by the name of WEST BOYLSTON, bounded as follows, viz. on the north by Sterling, east by Boylston, south by Worcester, and west by Holden, being about four by five miles in extent, and lying near the centre of the county of Worcester.

In all these transactions, Ezra Beaman, Esq. was a very active man, and to his perseverance, influence, and wealth, the town is indebted for many of their present privileges; after its incorporation, he was successively chosen to represent the citizens in the State Legislature.

Soon after the town was incorporated, they remonstrated against the embargo laid by Mr. Jefferson, declaring it to be ruinous to the country; but their remonstrances did no good, and the embargo little injury to them.

In 1810, the Baptists first began to hold occasional meetings in town.

In 1812, an attempt was made to dismiss Mr. Nash, but it proved abortive—also a remonstrance was sent to Mr. Madison, against the war declared with Great Britain.

In 1813, the Baptists formed themselves into a distinct body, and had preaching about half the time in a school house. In 1818, the Baptist meeting house was built.

In 1815, the pastoral connexion between Mr. Nash and the parish was amicably and honorably dissolved, at his request, on account of ill health.

In 1816, Mr. Samuel Clark, of Princeton, was invited to preach as a candidate.

In 1818, Mr. Osgood, now of Sterling, preached a few Sabbaths in town.

In 1820, Mr. Shedd, of Acton, received a call to settle, which he declined; and in December, of the same year, Mr. John Boardman received a call to settle, with a salary of \$500. The votes were 65 to 28; many present declined acting.*

In January, 1821, Mr. Boardman gave his answer in the affirmative, stating his intention of exchanging with all the neighboring ministers, they had been regularly inducted into office; and accordingly he was ordained, February 28.

In 1819, a Baptist church was organized of about fifty members, who had been dismissed from the church in Holden. In 1821, they had constant preaching by Rev. Nicholas Branch.

Thus far we have followed the history of the town, in the connected series of events; we shall now attend to those particulars, not connected with its general history.

FACE OF THE COUNTRY, SOIL, AND PRODUCTIONS.—The face of the country is uneven, there being but very little champain land in town. The Nashua runs nearly through the whole town, from west to east, and the land rises on both sides, nearly as far as the boundary lines; but there is no very important elevation, except Malden hill, which is situated in the southwest part. From its summit a very pleasant and extensive prospect is afforded to the eye, fully sufficient to compensate for the trouble of a ride to the top. On the river is found some of the best interval land in the county, and in a high state of cultivation.

Nothing in the natural world can exceed the rich and luxuriant appearance of the great meadow in front of Beaman's tavern and the adjoining factory, and so extending down into the limits of Boylston.

The meanderings of the river, the canal for the factory, and the artificial pond, raised above the surface of the waving

* Several other gentlemen supplied the pulpit as candidates for a short time, whose names are not mentioned on record.

fields of grass, English grain, and yellow corn, bounded by rising woodlands, unite to show what the industry of man, and the bounty of the Creator can do, in beautifying and adorning what was an unsightly and dismal swamp, when Ephraim and Ezra Beaman commenced on this tract.

The soil is good, and fertile, without an exception, easily cultivated, and productive; well watered by streams and springs.

There are no swamps or bogs in town, and in some parts, there is a deficiency of stone to inclose farms with suitable fences. Our farmers have good pastures for neat stock, and sheep; and by cultivation, they have good hay, corn, rye, oats, potatoes, some wheat, and barley, and cider sufficient for their own use. The dairies in this town are not large, but excellent for butter.

The manufacturing establishments, give encouragement to the agriculturalist, by affording a ready market, for all his surplus produce. The farmer here, as in other portions of our county, needs only industry and economy to gather from his fields and employment, the full harvests of wealth and happiness.

RIVERS.—Quinnepoxet river from Holden, and Stillwater from Sterling, enter this town on the north, and west sides, and unite their waters just below the Upper Factory, and form, what is called NASHUA, which continues its course easterly, until it enters Boylston. Besides these, there are three or four brooks, in various parts of the town, which fertilize the land, and carry some light machinery during a part of the year.

ROADS AND BRIDGES.—There is no turnpike road intersecting this town; but the county road, from Worcester to Lancaster, and Groton, and also those to Princeton, Templeton, Sterling, Leominster, and Fitchburg, go through the town, from south to north. They are all post roads for the U. S. Mail, which passes every day in the week, except Sunday, opening a direct communication to Boston, New York, Providence, and Vermont.

The roads are generally in good repair, and easy for travelling, and connect with all the adjacent towns.

There are four wooden bridges for public use, which cost about five hundred dollars each. These roads and bridges are kept in repair by a tax of about four hundred dollars per annum.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS.—There are five districts in this town, with a brick school-house in each. They contain about 315 scholars, who are taught in the winter by masters, and in the summer by females. The schools in this town, are under the inspec-

tion of an active committee, and are kept about five months in each year at the public expense. The school tax for 1826, was four hundred dollars. In addition there are private schools kept every year, in nearly all the districts.

Although this town has never been considered high in a literary view, yet a large proportion of its native citizens have received the honors of college. The list is as follows :

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|------|-------|------------|------------|-------------------|
| Thomas Moore, | 1786 | D. U. | Clergyman, | Settled in | Virginia. |
| Alexander Lovell, | 1793 | | do. | " | Vermont. |
| Hosea Hildreth, | 1805 | H. U. | do. | " | Gloucester, Me. |
| Ephraim Hinds, | 1805 | H. U. | Attorney, | " | Harvard. |
| Elisha Hinds, | 1805 | | do. | | |
| Jonathan Bigelow, | 1816 | | Clergyman, | | |
| David L. Childs, | 1817 | H. U. | Attorney, | " | Boston. |
| Nathaniel Wood, | 1821 | H. U. | do. | " | do. |
| Seneca White, | 1819 | | Clergyman, | " | Bath, Me. |
| Sylvanus Morse, | | | | now in | Brown University. |
| John Childs, | | | Cadet | | West Point. |

BUSINESS AND TRADE.—There are in town five stores for retailing goods; two houses of entertainment, one of them having been known nearly a century, as "Beaman's," being now kept by the third generation of that name; a Post Office; four blacksmith shops; a trip hammer; scythe factory; and tan yard; cabinet maker; wheelwright; six shoemakers; and a book binder; two grist mills, one of them running three pair stones, three saw mills, clothing work, and carding machine. Baskets are manufactured to considerable extent in this town from white oak timber.

To these may be added, two practising physicians, two clergymen, and three magistrates. These last mentioned, are not crowded with professional business, as there is but little litigation in town, and no Attorney at Law. The present justices of the peace, are Joseph Hinds, Barnabas Davis, and R. B. Thomas, Esqrs.; the latter is the author of the Farmer's Almanac, which has been published thirty four years successively; 36,000 copies have been issued in a year; and 1,800,000 sold since its first publication.

MANUFACTORIES.—The water power in this town is quite extensive, but at present only partially improved, sufficient being left, to employ a large capital advantageously.

The oldest and largest establishment, was commenced in 1804, near Maj. Beaman's, and is called the Lower Factory: its operation being solely with cotton. In 1809, this property came into the hands of Mr. Robert Parkinson of England, and in 1812, was purchased of him, by the present owners, now doing business under the firm of John Slater, & Co. The establishment has been grad-

ually enlarged until, at this time, they run 2000 spindles, and make about 7000 yards of cloth, per week, of No. 16, sheetings.

The factory building is of wood, about 160 feet long, and three stories high. There are about 200 inhabitants in the village, and from 90 to 100 persons are employed by the company.

There is a chemical bleaching establishment, grist, and saw mill, with a large farm, attached to the factory. The canal to conduct the water to, and from the factory, is nearly one mile and a half in length. Should the business continue profitable, this company will soon enlarge their works, at their present establishment.

The next establishment, called the Upper Factory, is two miles above that first mentioned, and on the Stillwater river.

It was incorporated in 1813, by the name of the West Boylston Cotton and Wire Manufactory, with a capital of \$140,000, a small part of which was invested.

Owing to want of experience, but little progress was ever made in the Wire business, and it was soon relinquished. The manufacture of cotton, is now the chief business of the company.

They have two large buildings for machinery, one of brick, four stories high, 68 feet long, by 34 wide, containing 1000 Spindles, and 32 power looms. The other of wood, three stories high, 40 by 26 feet, and occupied for building machinery, both cotton and woollen, under the superintendence of an experienced workman. Here are employed about fifty workmen regularly : and about 5000 yards of cloth, shirting width, are made per week.

The village consists of about a dozen families, and one hundred and twenty inhabitants, and the hum of the spindle, and noise of the shuttle, indicate a prosperous course of business.

At this place there is a plentiful supply of water, as the waters of Quinneboxet are conveyed by a canal, into the factory pond, and far more extensive operations will be carried on, ere long, at the factory.

Last of all, is the establishment on the Nashua, called Hathorn's Mills, where there are seated together a grist and saw mill, a trip hammer, a manufactory of cotton *batting*, and yarn, a clothier's shop, and carding machine, owned by different individuals, and situated intermediate of the other factories. The grist mill here has a great run of business. About two hundred dozen scythes are made annually, and many edge tools. The manufacture of cotton, is on a small scale, by an individual proprietor.

These works are frequently deficient in the quantity of water

to move them. A new establishment for manufacturing cotton is soon to be commenced.

One thing is deserving of notice in relation to these factories, and which, for the credit of the managing agents, ought to be known: it is, the attention paid to the morals, and instruction of the children, and youth. We feel safe in affirming from our own observation, that it only requires firmness of principle, and patience in its exercise, to render a factory village as orderly, and decorous as any other.

MISCELLANEOUS.—In the south part of the town, there is a beautiful, and romantic spot, called Pleasant Valley. At some remote period, it was the location of a small pond; the area of the place is about an acre and a half, of an elliptical form, and surrounded by a range of hills, covered with trees, which open at the southwest end and stretch along in parallel ranges, for one fourth of a mile. The path to the valley is between them. The bottom of the valley is a smooth, plane surface, covered with the richest verdure. The singular, silent, and wild features of the place, render it a pleasant retreat to the lovers of nature and retirement.

The earthquake in 1755, produced a very singular phenomenon in this town. A piece of land about ten rods square, on the west bank of Quinnepoxt river, sunk about ten or twelve feet. This, at the time excited great curiosity, and was visited by hundreds, but the inundations of the river have nearly filled up the chasm.

At the Upper Factory Village, there is a Mineral Spring, which was discovered in repairing the embankment of the pond. It runs over a bed of pyrites under the pond. The water is strongly impregnated with iron, and slightly with sulphur; no gas is emitted.

This town presents no peculiar attractions to the mineralogist. Some fine specimens of Schorl, bedded in quartz, have been found; also, some uncommonly beautiful formations of Mica; iron is occasionally met with, but in small masses.

A few traces of the aborigines of the country have been discovered. In repairing the road below the lower factory, in 1825, a skeleton, brass kettle and spoon, were discovered; the skeleton was supposed to be that of an Indian Squaw. A few stone chissels and arrows have been found in our fields.

The first settlers built a stockade fort, of square logs, for defence, on the land now owned by Mr. John Temple. This fort stood until within about forty years, the only intimations of any hostilities against it were a few bullets lodged in the timbers.

There is a Social Library in town, of about two hundred select volumes, and owned in shares. Another Society own the Edinburgh Encyclopedia. There are also two associations for acquiring useful knowledge, and discussing questions.

These are only the incipient operations of institutions, which must continue to exert a favorable influence upon the interests of literature and science.

These institutions are supported by a class of people who have not before had the treasures of science opened to their minds, nor would they now, but for such combined exertions.

Among other strange things, there is a singular fraternity of men, who have lived in five incorporated towns, and two parishes, and yet, have never resided off the farms where they were born. This is explained by the tract called the leg being so often transferred to other towns.

There is not less than one hundred feet of water fall in this town, and two or three good sites for manufacturing establishments. As this will eventually be a manufacturing town to a large extent, it is not improbable that the Blackstone or Massachusetts Canal will be extended to the place.

INHABITANTS.—The number of inhabitants at the last census, was 937, but now they have increased to about 1100; there being 178 families, with 260 rateable polls. The increase of population in this town is about 35 net gain, per annum. In 1821, there were 210 polls, increase of 50 in five years.

The Manufacturing interests, will undoubtedly give this town a great increase of population.

There is a general equality among them, as none can boast of the distinctions, which great wealth, family, or honors, confer on the few who are the favorites of fortune. Industry and economy are prominent traits in the character of our citizens; Agriculture, or Manufactures, claim their chief attention. They live easily and comfortably, unless an evil spirit, residing in taverns, or grogshops, happens to draw them away from home, to the sorrow, and distress of their families.

List of Taxes.—For Schools, \$400 per annum.—Highways, \$400 : Support of the poor, \$400 on an average.—Incidental expences, \$200.—Support of the Gospel, \$1000 per annum. Total of necessary taxes, \$2400.

Deaths.—1798—8 : 1800—10 : 1810—10 : 1820—18 : 1825—16.

RELIGIOUS.—The people in this town, are of various denominations, viz. Congregationalists, both Orthodox, and Unitarians, Baptists, Universalists, a few Methodists, and one family of Quakers.

The Congregationalists were the first, and are now, the most numerous sect in this town, there being about 160 rateable polls in the parish. They have a Meeting House built thirty years since, before the parish was set off. It is situated near the centre of the town, and has a pleasant location, with a beautiful level common, and good sheds in the rear. The church, and parish, were in a harmonious state, as long as Mr. Nash remained their pastor; since his dismissal, they have been divided, and occasionally some controversies have arisen between the parties, chiefly respecting their minister.*

After Mr. Nash resigned the pastoral office, several gentlemen were invited to supply the pulpit, but none could be found who had the happiness to unite all parties.

In 1820, the present pastor, Rev. John Boardman, A. M. of Dartmouth College, was settled. In this measure the Unitarians and Universalists, never concurred, and afterwards a very respectable minority seceded from the parish; alledging that their feelings had not been sufficiently regarded, in a transaction of such importance.

When the town was incorporated, parochial powers were not included in the act, (although, until this time they had been exercised;) those who declined Mr. Boardman's ministry, refused to pay a tax for the support of the gospel, which they considered illegal. This induced the friends of Mr. Boardman to petition the Legislature to pass an act or resolution, empowering them to revive the old precinct formed in 1796, and re-organize it in such a manner as to enable them, as a parish, to support a Minister. Notwithstanding a remonstrance was presented against the petition, the legislature in 1823, authorized the re-organization of the ancient precinct. Since this, they have gone on their own way, rejoicing under the ministry of their own selection. They have a fund of about \$2000 for the support of Mr. Boardman. The church when gathered consisted of 32 members; since then 135 have been added to it; and the total number now, is about 90.

The Baptists, follow next in order, having first held their meetings in 1810, being then members of the church in Helden. In 1812,

* Rev. Mr. Nash still resides in town, in easy circumstances. Mr. Nash removed from Williamsburg, Mass. and was graduated from Yale College, in 1791.

they were organized as a society by law, and had preaching part of the time, by Elders Goddard, and Marshall. In 1815, the members of Holden church, residing in this town were set off, as a branch, and in 1819, were recognized as a distinct church, which consisted of about 50 members. The preceding year, they had erected a meeting house, 44 by 36 ft. on a piece of land given them by Robert B. Thomas, Esq. This house is now finished, and stands about two miles north of the centre of the town at the Upper Factory, and is exclusively, the property of the church, who rent the pews annually, towards the support of their pastor.

The peace and harmony of this church and society, have never been disturbed since its organization. The increase has been gradual, and there are now, 80 rateable polls, belonging to the society, residing in this town, and the adjacent parts of Sterling and Holden. Various preachers were employed for a short time, until the church was organized. Since then, the Rev. Nicholas Branch, preached about three years; but was never pastor. After he removed, the church in 1823, chose Rev. Alling Hough, A. M. of Brown University, their pastor; he accepted the call, and continued in office about eighteen months; when he was called away by death, from his labors on earth. "He lived respected, and beloved by his people," and died at the age of 32.

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In December 1824, the church invited their present pastor, Charles C. P. Crosby, to preach as a candidate, and March following, the church and society, gave him a unanimous call to settle; with a salary of \$270 per ann. and four Sabbaths for his own benefit. The call being accepted, he was ordained, April 13, 1825.

On the settlement of Mr. Crosby, the society immediately began to build a parsonage, for the convenience of their minister, to cost them when finished, about \$1500. Since the institution of the church 70 have been baptised, 34 received by letter, and the church now contains 134 members.

There is no Unitarian or Universalist Society in town; but there have been persons of those persuasions for many years. They did not dissent from the old parish, until 1823, when a legal tax for the support of Mr. Boardman was about to be laid on them; about thirty joined the Restoration Society, in Shrewsbury, and about fifteen joined Dr. Bancroft's Society in Worcester, and Mr. Osgood's in Sterling. The Restoration people have preaching about once in two months, in the centre school house.

PLEASANT VALLEY. NOTE.

The following notice of the beautiful little spot mentioned in the preceding memoir, with the accompanying lines, is copied from the American (Boston) Traveller of July 14.

On leaving the road you enter a grove of oaks and maples, between two declivities, and continuing down this avenue that winds along through the shrub oaks, at once opens to the view a plain of three or four acres of an oval form, surrounded on every side, excepting only the narrow pass by which you enter, by high and almost perpendicular banks, whose sides are covered by the birch and the shrub oak and whose tops are surmounted by trees of the largest size. The plain is more level and smooth than art could make it, no remains of ancient trees, no stone, not even a stray branch of the neighboring grove mar the scene. A fine short grass covers the whole area and presents to the eye an enchanting fairy green.—The stillness of death reigns, undisturbed by the noise of the world. It is a place for contemplation, where man can turn his thoughts home to his own breast and meditate on the follies of the world, or where he can upturn them to Him, the supreme architect of nature.

Sweet vale of West Boylston ! how calm a retreat,
From the sorrows and cares of this cold world of woe ;
With thy thick covered banks, where the wild flowers meet,
And thy serpentine paths where the evergreens grow.

Oh here, the war trumpet shall never be heard,
Here, the banners of foemen shall ne'er be unfurl'd ;
At the tramp of the war horse thy paths shall be barred,
And Peace with her wand bid him back to the world.

Thy carpet so green, 'neath the blue sky outspread,
Shall never be soiled by the foot of dishonor—
Here, the children of nature by truth shall be led,
And fear not th' intrusion of care or of sorrow.

Be this the retreat of the votaries of Love,
For the friends of the heart—be it Piety's fane
Where their vows and their prayers shall ascend—and above
Shall be heard, and Heaven grant they be heard not in vain.

Oh here, have I roved with the friend of my heart,
When the last rays of sunshine were gilding the spot—
And the thoughts of that hour, they shall never depart,
And the friends that were there shall ne'er be forgot.

